

Use of Chlorine in Organic Handling Operations

7 C.F.R 205.601(a)(2), 205.603(a)(3), and 205.605(b)(9) provides for the use of chlorine materials as algicides, disinfectants and sanitizers in organic crop, livestock and handling operations. The annotation on the use of chlorine materials restricts the residual chlorine levels in the water to the maximum residual disinfectant limit under the Safe Drinking Water Act. This limit is currently established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at 4 mg/L for chlorine. The National Organic Program has received a number of questions regarding the use of chlorine in certified operations and the sampling protocol to be used by accredited certifying agents (ACA) in monitoring the maximum residual disinfectant limit for chlorine materials. The following Q and A's are designed to clarify these issues.

Q. What is the "maximum residual disinfectant level?"

A. "Maximum residual disinfectant level" is a term defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as the highest level of a disinfectant allowed in drinking water. This level is currently established by EPA at 4 mg/L for chlorine. Practically applied under the National Organic Standards, the term "maximum residual disinfectant level" refers to the chlorine level of the waste water at the discharge or effluent point.

Q. As an ACA, at what point in crop, livestock or handling operations should I monitor for the maximum residual disinfectant limit?

A. ACA's must monitor the discharge or effluent point to ensure that certified operators are meeting the 4 mg/L limit as set forth by the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Q. As a crop, livestock or handling operation, am I restricted to use chlorine at the maximum residual disinfectant limit specified under the Safe Drinking Water Act, currently 4 mg/L, at the beginning of the wash/rinse water cycle?

A. No. Levels of chlorine used to prepare water to be used to disinfect/sanitize tools, equipment, product or food contact surfaces may be higher than 4 mg/L and should be at levels sufficient to control microbial contaminants. Therefore, chlorine use at the beginning of the applicable water cycle in an organic operation is not limited to 4 mg/L.

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